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VAGABOND PLAYS—No. 2

ON VENGEANCE HEIGHT

A Play in One Act

By Allan Davis and Cornelia C. Vencill



Baltimore
The Norman, Remington Company
1920

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TO
M. D. D.

This play was first produced by
the Vagabond Players in Baltimore,
Maryland, on February 2, 1920.

FIRST PRODUCED AT THE VAGABOND THEATRE FEB.
2, 1920, WITH THE FOLLOWING

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHERIDAH GORMLEY.....Edmonia Nolley
HOPE Somia Whitman
LEM CARMALT.....Clapham Murray, Jr.
CLAY.....Patrick Riley

Produced by Mrs. John E. Boisseau

Setting by Edward Berge

SCENE: *A cabin in the Tennessee Mountains.*
Thirty years ago.
October. Evening.

Note on the dialogue:

*The mountaineers often use several forms of the
same word interchangeably.*

ON VENGEANCE HEIGHT

(Right and Left are from the point of view of the actor)

SCENE: *The cabin of the Gormleys in the Tennessee mountains. Everything primitive.*

The heavy door is in the centre of the rear wall, and to the right and left of it are small windows. In the right wall, towards the front, an open fireplace with crane, kettle, and other implements. On the left, a rude framework supporting a pallet covered with dark gray blankets and a bear robe. At the further end of this bed, ladder-like steps rising from the floor to a trap-door in the low ceiling, leading to the loft.

A log settle stands out in the cabin at the upper end of the fireplace. In front of the fireplace, a spinning-wheel and chair. A rough pine table and two chairs, made of scantling, at the centre. A single shelf in the centre of the room hung from the low, unhewn beam which runs from left to right across the room. A rifle over the chimney piece; pelts. Brushwood, kindling, and logs.

It is mid-October. Evening. A fire under the kettle.

As the curtain rises, it discloses CHERIDAH GORMLEY (GRAM) spinning. She is past sixty and blind, but vigorous with the wiry strength of the mountain people. The door, which swings inward to the left, is open. Through it, a last crimson ray of the setting sun falls upon the woman, showing

her face as that of one whose elemental nature has become softened and spiritualized by loneliness and grief.

The ray fades, disappears. Twilight upon the mountains.

The woman spins, and hums. As the twilight deepens, she sings the words of the hymn.

GRAM

“O Thou fr’m Whom all goodness flows,
I lif’ my soul ter thee;

In all my sorrers, conflic’s, woes,

Dear Lord, remember me.”

(She stops abruptly and listens. Then, before anybody appears—challengingly)

Who’s thar? Who’s thar, I say?

(Brightly)

That yo’, Hope?

(Bustling, as she rises)

Come in, child, come in.

HOPE TAVENDER

(Entering with a basket—a young mountain woman, barefoot and in homespun)

Seems like yo’ could hear a robin a-hoppin’ on
th’ sof’ grass, th’ way yo’ know who’s a-comin’,
Gram. Seems like yo’ could mos’ see.

GRAM

(Pleased)

W’en th’ Lord takes one thing, he gives anuther.
My hearin’ gits better’n’ better.

(As she feels her way to the center)

Whar air ye, child?

HOPE

(Putting her basket upon the table)

Hyar.

GRAM

(Taking her hands—motherly)

Light th' lantern, an' set down. Yo' mus' be ti-erd.

(Sitting right of table as Hope goes to the fireplace with the lantern)

Yo're the workingest gal in these hyar hills, Hope. An' yo' mus'n't come way over hyar so of'en jes' fur me.

HOPE

(As she lights the lantern with a sliver of kindling)

W'en my pore mammy war a-dyin', didn' yo' come way down t'our cabin in all weathers nights, t' keer fer her? My pap he don't fergit hit even ef he is old and cain't come hisself.

GRAM

(As Hope rises and crosses back of her to the head of the table.)

Yo'r mammy war my neighbor. Hit pleased me.

HOPE

(Almost sharply)

Wall, yo're my neighbor, and hit pleasures me now.

(In a milder tone)

I've fotched yo' some shortened bread I jes' baked, an' some quinces fur jelly. They's all peeled an' ready. An' hyar's some chinquapins and paw-paws. They's jes' right now.

GRAM

(Gratefully)

Yo' do more'n ketch my chickens an' do my chores an' fotch me corn pone an' quinces an' chinquapins an' paw-paws, Hope. Yo' fotch me yer'self w'en hit's lonely, an' yer voice wen hit's a-quiet. . . . The days air long an' always—black. I set a-listenin' fur th' owls ter hoot so's I'll know w'en night comes.

(With a change)

I dunno whut I'd a done without ye, sence Clay done went away t'larn.

HOPE

Hit won't be so lonesome fer yo' w'en he comes back.

GRAM

(With hurried evasion)

Oh, I hain't in no hurry fur Clay t' come back. No hurry 't all.

HOPE

(Thoughtfully)

He mus' be purty near ter growed up now.

GRAM

(Anxiously)

Growed up? W'y he's jes' a child.

HOPE

He's sixteen.

GRAM

Whut's sixteen? 'Tain't nuthin' but a boy, that's what he is—nuthin' but a little boy.

HOPE

Been gone six years, hain't he?

GRAM

(Uneasily)

Yas—sence his father war shot.

HOPE

The men at the Gap war a-sayin'——

(Catches herself up)

GRAM

(Quickly, but with difficulty)

Whut war they a-sayin'?

HOPE

Oh, nuthin'——

(Attempting to change the subject)

Is thar ennything I kin do hyar fur yo', Gram,
afore I go?

GRAM

Yo' hain't good at keepin' things back, Hope.
Whut war th' men down ter the Gap a-sayin'?

HOPE

(Sullenly)

Nothin'.

GRAM

(Sharply—with authority)

Whut war they a-sayin', I axed?

(Pause—strongly)

I'm a-waitin' fer ter hear.

HOPE

Well, they sez ez how you're *a-keepin'* Clay from
comin' back.

GRAM

(Glibly)

O' course I'm a-keepin' him fr'm comin' back. Everybody knows that. I want him ter git some larnin' afore he's growed up an' too old.

HOPE

(Slowly)

They sez hit's 'cause you're scairt.

GRAM

(Springing to her feet aroused)

Who sez that? Scairt?

(Walking up and down wrathfully)

Me, Cheridah Gormley, scairt? Ev'rybody in these hyar mountains knows how scairt I am.

(With proud laughter)

Scairt am I? Scairt!—w'en I killed Bryce Carmalt with my own hands.

(With a change)

Gowd fergive me my wicked pride. Gowd fergive me my sins.

(With a cry)

Hope—air you thar?

HOPE

Yas.

GRAM

Kem hyar.

(Hope goes to her—the older woman clings to her)

Hope, I *am* scairt. I hain't never tole nobody before, but it's Gowd's truth an' it's always with me—a-watchin' me.

(Tremblingly)

I'm scairt—I'm scairt.

HOPE

(Soothing her)

I know how yo're feelin'.

GRAM

(Swaying herself backward and forward—in a dead voice)

No, yo' don' know. Nobody cud know less she'd been thro' it—nobody.

(Pause)

Is it dark yet outside, Hope?

HOPE

Thar's a little light.

GRAM

Go t' the winder an' look out—t' th' left.

(Hope does so)

Thar's Vengeance Height . . . ?

HOPE

Yas.

GRAM

Y' see somethin' 'ginst the sky?

HOPE

(Suspecting what's coming)

O' course.

GRAM

Some boulders 'bout's high's a man?

HOPE

(Sympathetically)

Yas. But don't make me count 'em agen.

GRAM

Count 'em.

HOPE

(Unwillingly)

I know how many thar air, Gram.

GRAM

(Firmly)

Count 'em.

HOPE

Well, jest because ye want me to. . . . Startin' fr'm th' fur side—thar's one——

GRAM

(At the center, interrupting, her sightless eyes gazing before her)

Thar's whar my man Zeke's buried. 'Twar twenty year back. Er old sow of ourn had done strayed away through a hole in the pen, an' the Carmalts they claimed hit. The Carmalts—how I disgust that name!—Zeke went over t' see 'em 'bout it—friendly like. One thing led to 'nuther—thar war high words—an' old Jim Carmalt—he shot Zeke—he shot him fr'm behin', without warnin' an' without a-givin' him a chance. . . . My Zeke—my man Zeke. . . .

(Living through it again)

I 'member w'en they fotched him thro' that door, an' I turned down the kiver of that thar bed fer him, an' they laid him on it, an' I tuk th' lint rags

f'm this shelf an wropped him, and watched him an' watched. But the mornin' o' th' next day, when it was a-gittin' gray thro' the winders' an' the mockin' birds was a-whistlin' an' th' cuckoos a-callin' an' the peckerwoods a-tappin', an' eve'y-thing was beginnin' agin outside—he died.

(With grim but shaking interrogation)

Thar's anuther boulder beside that one, hain't thar?

HOPE

Y-a-s.

GRAM

That's Jeff—my fust born. He killed Jim Carmalt as kilt his pap; an' then Bryce Carmalt killed *him*.

(Pause—intensely)

Go on a-countin'——

HOPE

(With difficulty)

Three-four——

GRAM

Them's my boys Steve and Tolliver. They war a-swimmin' one evenin' in Black Pool, an' Lem Carmalt, he shot 'em both, an' they died—in th' water——

(Hope turns away with a shudder)

(Pressing her)

Why hain't yo' countin'?

HOPE

I—I—cain't.

GRAM

Yo' cain't count 'em, but I buried 'em, an' I kin

count 'em. . . . Th' nex' is five. . . . That war my boy Tom. He accounted fur *two* o' th' Carmalts afore they got him. . . . An' when he war a-dyin', I tole him he done well, an' he went out a-smilin'.

(Pause—less strongly)

An' the nex' is six . . . my boy Cliff—Clay's pappy. A mammy loves all her boys, but I reckon I loved Cliff mos'—he hed curly chestnut hair an' war allers bright an' smilin' an'—oh he war jes'—*Cliff*. . . . He war a-takin' me ter th' Gap. Hit war 'bout this time o' year. The milkweed pods war a bustin' an' thar war asters, an' barberry bresh red's a flannel shirt in th' woods, an' a power o' golden-rods a shinin' clean an' yaller. How good I cud see in them days—how good I cud see! . . . I wuz on hoss-back behin' Cliff, an' he war a-singin'. Then sudden a turkey-buzzar' riz up a-tween the hoss's hoofs—an afore I cud even think how bad a sign it wuz, Lem Carmalt an' two more of 'em done fired at us. . . . Cliff got one of them—an' then—they shot Cliff—an' w'en I see him layin' theer so still, I tuk his Win-chester an' shot Bryce Carmalt—

(Pause—slowly)

An' then Lem Carmalt he fired at me—an'—I lost my eyes.

(Simply—as if summing it all up)

An' thar war six boulders on Vengeance Height, in our plot, an' five in th' Carmalt's plot—an' me.

(With a change)

That's why w'en th' circuit rider asked me t' give him Clay t' take to school w'en he war ten year old, I let him go. That's why I've kep' him away these six years—t' keep him safe. . . .

(With an outcry of stifled grief and loneliness)

D' you reckon I relish my little gran'son t' be away? D' you reckon I relish t' live hyar all alone, blin' an' helpless? But I'm gittin' old. I cain't stand things ez I could . . . Clay's all I got, and I'm scairt fur him—scairt o' that rattlesnake Lem Carmalt as killed my boys Steve an' Tolliver an' Cliff an' tuk away my sight—I'm scairt . . . I'm scairt. . . .

HOPE

(With mountain philosophy)

Clay's a man. He'll hev t' take up the war.

GRAM

Yo're young an' yo're hard. Whut d' you know 'bout a war that yo' kin talk so easy? Yo hain't hed twenty years of it. Twenty years back hit begun—twenty years hit hez lasted . . . bitter years—dark years. . . . One by one they kem thro' that door. One by one they laid on that pallet-bed an' I watched over 'em—all but Cliff—an' one by one they died—an' Cliff he died, too. . . . The war! Ef hit mus' go on, lemme die fust, dear Gowd, lemme die fust.

HOPE

(Kneels on floor beside her)

I am young, an' hard, an' I don' know—I'm sorry, Gram, sorry I talked that-a-way. W'y Lem Carmalt hain't been seen hyar fer months. He mus' be gone away. Maybe he's gone fer good.

GRAM

(Hopefully)

D' yo' reckon?

HOPE

I'm shore.

GRAM

(Raising and embracing the girl)

Oh ye air a good gal, Hope. . . . I wish I could see yo'. . . . Ye war sech a little thing w'en my eyes saw las'.

(Pause, while she passes her finger tips over the girl's features)

Yo' favor yer mammy—but I wish I could see!

(Hope kisses her impulsively)

(Moved)

Why Hope!

(Pause. . . . The owls hoot outside)

Thar's the owls a-hootin'.

(Gently)

Ye better be a-goin' back afore hit gits too late.

HOPE

(Putting some brushwood on the fire)

Kin I take th' lantern?

GRAM

Why shorely. Whut good's er lantern ter me?

HOPE

I'll be over t'morrer.

GRAM

Y' air always welcome.

HOPE

Night.

GRAM

Night.

(Hope swings off through the door and to the left. The fire burns up a little—Gram hums and spins once more. As she does so, LEM CARMALT, a man well over six feet tall, a powerful, grizzled creature in homespun and blue shirt and carrying a rifle, comes to the door with the craft and silence of a woodsman, and stands there watching her intently)

GRAM

(Stopping suddenly)

Someone's in this room.

(Pause)

Who is it?

(With increasing uneasiness)

I know yo're thar. Who is it?

(Wildly)

Who is it, I say?

LEM

(Grimly quiet—without moving)

Who d' yer reckon hit is?

GRAM

(Cries out, leaping to her feet)

Lem—Carmalt. Lem . . . Carmalt!!

LEM

(Sharply)

That thar's my name, an' ye be mighty respec'ful ez how ye speak hit.

GRAM

(Breathless)

Y-You—! Y-y-ou!—How dar' ye set foot hyar in my cabin?

LEM

(Grimly)

Yer door's open.

GRAM

Hain't ye th' scum o' th' yearth ter kem hyar like this, a-knowin' I'm 'lone! Whut fer air ye hyar?

LEM

Whut fer am I hyar? I'm hyar fer ter welcome Clay.

GRAM

(Mystified)

C-Clay . . . he hain't hyar.

LEM

I done heerd tell of a young lookin' stranger t' other side o' th' Gap. Jinny Wilkins—th' half wit—she said ez he war a-huntin' quail—an' he looked like Clay. So I kem ter welcome him laike I welcomed three other Gormleys afore him.

GRAM

(White to the lips)

Gowd—Gowd!

(Suddenly turning to him)

Lem, ye said ye done killed three Gormleys?

LEM

(Proudly)

Yas. Yer Tom, he got two of ourn, but I got three o' yourn—I did—three—they was Steve an' Tolliver an' Cliff.

(Fondling his gun stock)

Thar's the notches.

GRAM

(Almost beside herself)

Yas. . . . An' thar's six o' ourn gone an' I'm good's daid. Say seven o' ourn an' on'y five o' yourn. So far, yo're side's ahead, hain't hit, Lem?

LEM

(Grimly toneless)

Waal I reckon.

GRAM

(Suddenly)

Lem, let's call hit off.

LEM

Whut?

GRAM

The war. I hain't got many more years ter live. I'll soon be gone. Thar's on'y Clay and you lef'. Live out yer years, Lem; let him live out hisn.

(With a struggle)

I'll take th' shame o' th' Gormleys a-bein' beaten. Let's say quits.

LEM

I swore I wouldn't put back my rifle-gun while thar war a Gormley a-livin'.

GRAM

Then ye swore murder.

(A movement from Lem)

Yas, I said murder. Afore I got r'ligion, I didn' reckon it that-a-way, but shore's Gowd's up thar a-lookin' down on us, hit's murder. D' you think He wants ye to keep an oath like that?

LEM

I said I'd do it, an' I'm a-goin' t'.

GRAM

A' right, an' suppose ye do it. Suppose ye git Clay th' way ye got th' uthers, an' I die too, an' all th' Gormleys air gone, and yo're lef', jes' yo, Lem Carmalt. Yo'll sit on' yo'r chair in front o' th' fire, and yo'll hol' yer rifle-gun t' yo' an' feel o' the *four* notches cut on th' stock, an' yo think yo'll be happy then, Lem, don't ye? Yo' think yo'll be happy?

LEM

(Transported)

Yas—I'll be happy. I'll be a-restin' thar an' a-thinkin' how I cleaned 'em up. Hit'll be th' gladdest hour of my life.

GRAM

Hit'll be the bitterest, 'cause yo'll know four men is a-standin' up afore their Maker an' a-pointin' down ter yo'. Each one of 'em a-pintin' t' yo' and each one a-sayin', "Thar's Lem Carmalt as killed me." An' thar'll be thunder an' lightnin' in yer heart, an' th' face o' Gowd a-burnin' in yer face. . . . That's how yo'll be happy, Lem.

LEM

Y' cain't move n'e with that thar talk. I know whut I'm a-goin' ter do.

GRAM

(In desperation)

Y' cain't git Clay. He's too fur from hyar.

LEM

I'll hunt him out. Should ha' done it long ago.

GRAM

(As a last effort)

Ef I cain't make yo' listen fur th' sake o' th' Word, listen fur th' sake o' yer pride. Ef yo' kill Clay, yo' on'y kill a boy, an' whut'll th' mountains say t' that?

(Imploringly)

Wait till he's a man, Lem, wait till he's a man.

LEM

Leave him so's he kin git me? He's old enough t' pull a trigger.

(With a haunted look)

Somethin' keeps a-tellin' me t' watch out fur him. Th' las' six months, somethin' keeps a-sayin', "He'll git you onless ye git him fust." So I'm a-goin' ter git him.

GRAM

(Frantically)

Lem, leave Clay alone. Think o' me, Lem, hev pity on me. Clay's all I got lef'. Hain't I suffered enough? Hain't yo' had satisfaction enough?

LEM

(Thunderously)

No! An' I'll never hev enough. Ef you've seed yo'r man an' yo'r boys die, I've seed my pap an' my brothers die—shot down by yourn. Ef you've been misruble—wot of me—a-slinkin' aroun' on th' hills like a wild animal—a-sleepin' with my eyes an' ears open—a-listenin' t' ev'y leaf—a-watchin' ev'y shadder. Gowd, th' life I've hed!

GRAM

Not in th' las' six years.

LEM

Wall, hit's beginnin' again, an' I cain't rest. But w'en th' Gormleys is done, then I'll rest well.

GRAM

(Shrieking with rage)

Ef I could only git ye myself. . . . Ef I could only see long enough fur one shot at yer pizen heart!

LEM

You'll never glint 'long th' sights on a gun bar'l again, y' ole she devil.

GRAM

(Facing him—her eyes upturned)

Hain't yo' proud o' yer wurk—Look at hit—look——

(Taking hold of him and thrusting her blind face into his eyes)

Now th' nex' time yo' sight along yo'r gun—'stead o' seein' Clay, see these eyes in front o' yo'. See 'em always—in yo'r cabin, an' w'en yo' go out—in th' darkness an' th' rain an' th' bright sunlight an' in mornin' an' at night—always in front o' yo'. An' w'en yo'r finger te'ches th' trigger feel hit slippy with th' blood o' th' men yo'r murderin' han's hev killed, an' shoot wide o' the mark, Lem, shoot wide o' the mark.

LEM

(Savagely)

Shet up, I say. Hold yer jaw.

GRAM

(Borne along)

An' now git out of hyar. A Carmalt y' air, an' a Carmalt you'll die—a polecat like all th' uther polecats—yer kin.

LEM

(Furiously)

Yo' leave my name alone or by——

GRAM

(Scornfully)

Why don't ye shoot? I ain't afeerd o' yo'.

LEM

(With a rough push rather than blow, sending her sprawling onto the floor)

Ye hain't worth shootin'.

(At the door—quietly)

An' look hyar—ef I ketch yo out on th' trail, I'll jes' finish the work I begun six years ago.

(In his grimly 'quiet, almost colorless tone)

Blin' ole cat.

(He goes out)

(Gasping and quaking with excitement, and with inarticulate cries of pain and impotent rage, Gram rises, hurries as quickly as she can to the door, bangs it to and bars it, and puts up the wooden shutters and bars them. As she is moving away from them to the table, she throws her head back as if listening to something overhead. The trap door opens, and the face of a dark haired boy appears in the opening.)

CLAY

(Softly, at the trap door)

Gram.

GRAM

(To herself)

Hit hain't true. I'm jes' a-hearin' hit.

CLAY

Gram, don' you hear me?

(He hurries down the ladder. A tall handsome young boy of sixteen, in corduroys—a rifle slung over his shoulder. He carries a few quail and some wild flowers)

GRAM

(Overjoyed, yet not believing her senses)

Is it—Is it? . . .

CLAY

Yas, Gram.

GRAM

Hit's Clay!

CLAY

Yas, hit's me.

GRAM

(Embracing him)

My boy, my little boy Clay—my little boy Clay.

CLAY

(Importantly)

I'm not little enny mo', Gram.

GRAM

(Smiling)

Shorley not. Yo're quite a man.

CLAY

(Pleased. Slips off his rifle and puts it upon the table)

Yas . . . an' I reckoned 't was 'bout time I got

home t' do somethin' fur you. So I borreyed the circuit rider's ol' critter Colonel—funniest ol' hoss y' ever did see—an' I tuk my rifle-gun and kem over th' hills. Look what I've brought you.

GRAM

(Touching them)

Some pa'tridges.

CLAY

Yas. Y'ought ter see me shoot 'em. Plink—on th' wing too—an' they drap daid. Circuit rider sed ef I knew my Bible's well's I knew how t' shoot, I'd be better off. But I tole him shootin' come natch'l an' th' Bible didn't.

(Pleasantly)

Hyar's white everlastin' an' some evenin' prim-roses I found on th' way. They looked laiike drops o' snow an' yellor sunshine on th' black mountains.

(Remembering her blindness)

Oh. . . .

GRAM

Don' mind, Clay. I like ter know w'en things look purty. But how'd yo' get in?

CLAY

I wanted to surprise yo, so I tethered ol' Colonel down in th' dip—and come over my ol' secret trail, and up through the holler tree jes' outside thar—an' 'cross th' branch right into th' lof' window. Oh, it's gran' gettin' back into th' hills and among the pines again.

GRAM

Don' ye want somethin' t' eat?

CLAY

No. I stopped at th' Wilkins cabin, an' ole man Wilkins he give me somethin' t' eat.

GRAM

(Fear gripping her as she thinks of Lem)

Did Jinny Wilkins see yo'?

CLAY

Yas—o' course—but wherefo' yo say it that-a-way —“Jinny Wilkins?”

GRAM

Why, I done said it nachally. I don't mean nuthin' by it. . . . Come hyar, Clay—set beside me and tell me whut you've larned. Kin yo' read an' write some?

CLAY

(Troubled)

Yas—but I ain't thinkin' 'bout that. What makes ye ac' so quare, Gram?

GRAM

Nuthin', nuthin' 't all. What's quare, except bein' so glad t' see yo.

CLAY

Yo' don' ac' glad. Yo' ac' scairt laike.

GRAM

Why should I be scairt?

CLAY

I dunno.

(Looks round puzzled)

Why'd yo' bar th' doors an' winders? People in th' mountains don' bar their door.

GRAM

(Evasively)

I'm 'lone. Somebody might come in.

CLAY

(Suspiciously)

I thought I seen somebody go out'n that door when I was a-comin' over my ol' trail. I caught sight o' his shadder. Who was it, Gram? . . .

GRAM

Jes' ol' man Tavender.

CLAY

Seemed bigger'n ol' man Tavender.

GRAM

(With dignity)

I said 't war ol' man Tavender, Clay.

CLAY

(Sullenly)

Maybe I was wrong, but hit didn' seem like——

(The far scream of a horse in pain breaks his speech)

CLAY

What's that? Why hit's ol' Colonel. Pore critter, he's hurt hisself.

(He starts for the door)

GRAM

(Terror-stricken)

Hit hain't Colonel, Clay.

CLAY

Yes, 'tis.

GRAM

No, tain't, Clay. I tell ye tain't—I know.

CLAY

(Positively)

He's hurt—y' cain't fergit the screamin' of a hawss once you've heard it. I know that's Colonel.

GRAM

Don' go, Clay.

CLAY

Why not?

GRAM

Somebody's a-hurtin' him a-purpose.

CLAY

(Smiling)

Why, who'd hurt a hawss a-purpose—'less it was a Carma——

(The truth dawns on him—slowly)

It's Lem Carmalt!

GRAM

(Pause—slowly)

Yas, Clay. He's been hyar t'night. He's a-waitin' t' kill ye.

CLAY

Hyar! Lem Carmalt hyar! An' now he's hurtin' that pore ol' beast——

(He goes for his rifle, Gram seizes him)

Lemme go—lemme go I say. I got to git that thar snake.

GRAM

Don' go, Clay, fur my sake, don' go. Lem an' his hev taken all I hed. He'll take you now.

CLAY

I jes' pint blank got tuh go, Gram.

GRAM

(Beseechingly)

Listen to me, Clay. I need yo', Clay. I'm ol'—so ol'—so full of sorrers. Don' make it wuss fur me. . . . Don't go—my boy—my own boy—don' go.

CLAY

I'll do ennything else fur yo, Gram, but this I cain't.

GRAM

He'll kill yo' th' way he killed th' others, an' they'll lay yo' on that pallet-bed th' way they laid the——

(Breaks off—pushing the vision away from her)

I couldn't stan' hit, Clay. Hit would kill me. I cain't stand hit no mo'. The war's broke me. Ef I lose you, whut'll I hev left? Think o' me, Clay, think o' me.——

CLAY

I do think o' yo, Gram. Whut good 'd I be t' yo' ef ye knowed I war a coward?

GRAM

I won't never think it.

CLAY

Then all Vengeance Height'll think it, and that won't save me neither. Coward or no, ef I stay here or no, he'll kill me fust chance he gits. I got t' take my chance with him. I jes' haffter do it.

GRAM

Wait—wait—a leetle while—jes' a leetle while. He's a man growed, born an' raised on these mountings. He knows ev'y stone an' bresh. Yo've been away. Wait till yo've got a better chance 'gainst him.

CLAY

(Proudly)

I kin shoot's good's him.

GRAM

Hain't all yer larnin' teached ye better'n t' go out a-shootin' an' a-bein' shot at?

CLAY

(Civilization dropping from him)

Whut's larnin' w'en yo' got t' kill a man?

(Gram suddenly snatches his rifle and stands with her back to the door)

GRAM

Yo're not a-goin'.

CLAY

I'm not a-goin' that-a-way, but the way I kem. I'll creep through the lof' winder an' down th' hol-ler tree an' thro' the grass lik' a snake. I'd be willin' t' be a snake t' get him.

GRAM

(Frantically)

Yo're not a-goin', I say.

CLAY

(With a new dignity)

Thar's a Carmalt out thar, Gram.

GRAM

Yas.

CLAY

Yo know what they-uns done t' us.

GRAM

(The word being wrung from her)

Ya-a-s.

CLAY

Yo' killed one of 'em yo'self.

GRAM

Y-a-s.

CLAY

Then gimme that rifle-gun an' tell me t' go th' way y' tole yer sons ter go——

GRAM

(After an intense inward struggle, straightens out—and gives him the rifle)

Yo' air the son of my sons. Go an' God keep yer eye clar an' yer han' steady.

(He mounts the ladder and disappears)

(The moment after he has left the room, Gram flings out her arms and uncontrollably breaks into passionate prayer)

Gowd A'mighty, save him from th' hand o' that mis'ruble houn' a-waitin' fer him in th' dusk o' this night. Don' let him pay in his young innercence fer the sins o' his fathers, fer th' enemies they made, fer the blood they shed. Here 'm I—an ole, helpless woman—but don' cast me off—oh Lord—listen t' me in my trubble an' hev marcy on me. Take me 'stead o' him, O Lord. I ain't wuth a mite,

but his whole life's ahead, an' he's got larnin'—what cain't he do. I ain't selfish 'nuff t' want him an' me both spared. Ef it mus' be one t' be taken t'night, Lord Gowd A'mighty, let it be me!

(Two shots ring out. A third one follows, and after a pause a fourth. Gram rushes to the door, flings back the bar, throws the door open, and wildly calls, "Clay—Clay—Clay.")

Receiving no answer she breaks down utterly. Her frame shaking with sobs she walks to the couch, turns down the bear robe and the blankets, and arranges it as if to receive a wounded man. Then she feels her way to the table, reaches up to the hanging shelf, takes down a broad roll of linen, and stands there tearing it into bandages. The tears rolling down her cheeks she murmurs, "Clay, Clay.")

CLAY

(Now a pale, stern man comes to the doorway from the right)

I done got him, Gram. He's daid.

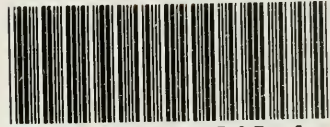
GRAM

(Throwing out her arms, beating her hands together, and in infinite pride, satisfaction, and ecstasy raising her shrill song of triumph)

He's daid—he's daid—Lem Carmalt's daid. My Clay, he killed him.

CURTAIN

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